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ABSTRACT

In 1993, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation launched a research project, "State Legislative Leaders: Keys To Effective Legislation for Children and Families." This report documents the findings of the project involving 177 of the most influential Republican and Democratic state legislature leaders from all 50 states. For more than a year, these leaders were interviewed by a bi-partisan team of pollsters on a wider range of issues relating to children and families. Also surveyed, by detailed written questionnaire, were 167 child and family organizations that participate in state-based legislative activity. The responses and comments of these organizations have served as a frame of reference against which to compare and contrast the views of the state legislative leaders. The key findings were: (1) legislative leaders' primary focus is managing the legislative process and the state budget, but they are increasingly speaking out on major policy issues; (2) child and family issues are generally important to state legislative leaders, however their importance varies from state to state; (3) state legislative leaders learn anecdotally about issues, not systematically, so their knowledge is often limited to their own districts and what others draw to their attention. Most leaders are unfamiliar with the current status of children and families in their districts or states and with effective policies and programs; (4) leaders see numerous individuals and organizations advocating different, often conflicting, legislative agendas for children and families; (5) child/family advocates are perceived as liberal and Democratic, whereas increasingly the leadership in state legislatures is moderate or conservative and Republican; (6) leaders are unaware of any cohesive, effective grassroots constituency for children in their states; (7) most leaders are unclear about child/family advocates' roles and are not predisposed to work closely with them; (8) some strategies promoted by child/family advocates are viewed by legislative leaders as irrelevant or counterproductive; (9) child/family advocate groups do not have the training, funding, and flexibility to develop and implement effective strategies; and (10) state legislative leaders need to become more pro-active in seeking out information on child and family issues. (KDFB)

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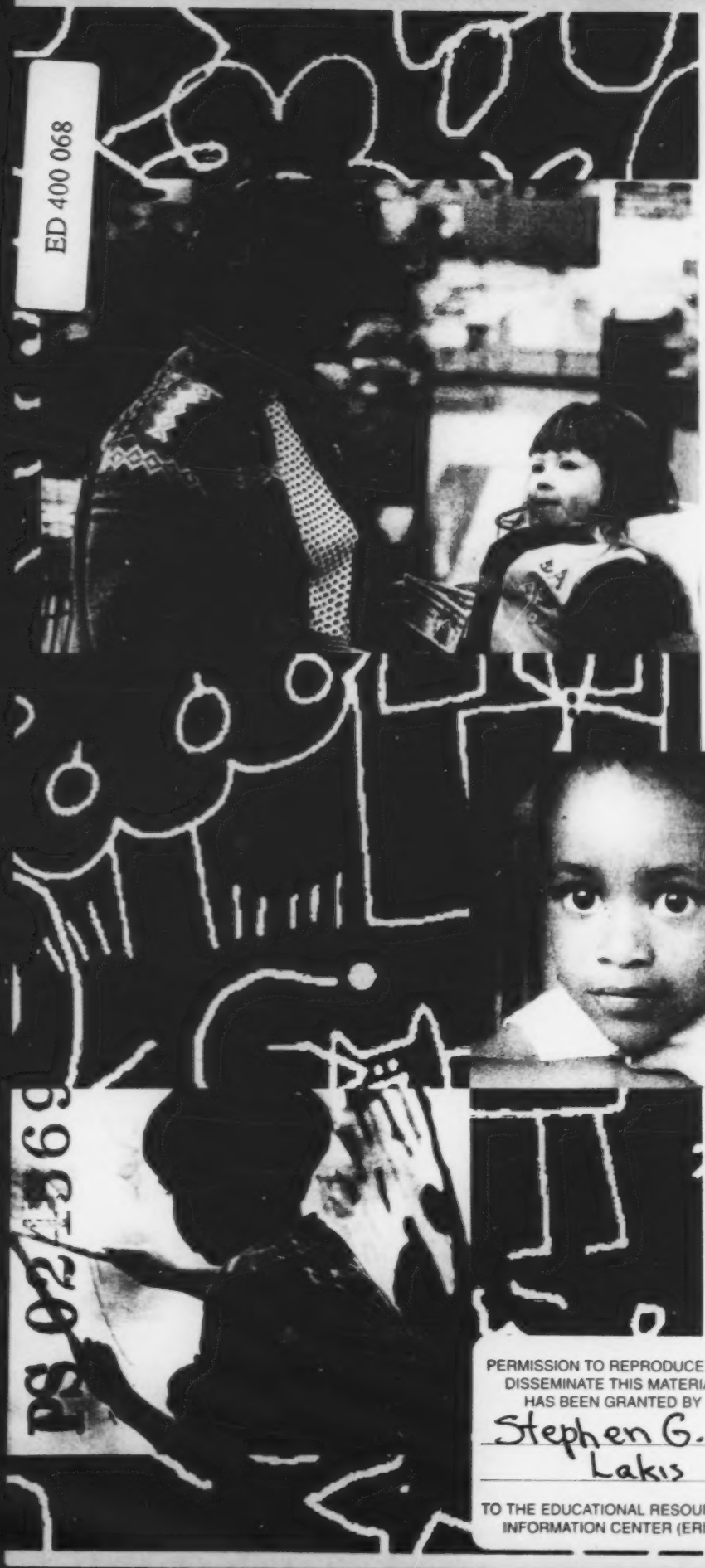

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State Legislative Leaders:

Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families

A REPORT

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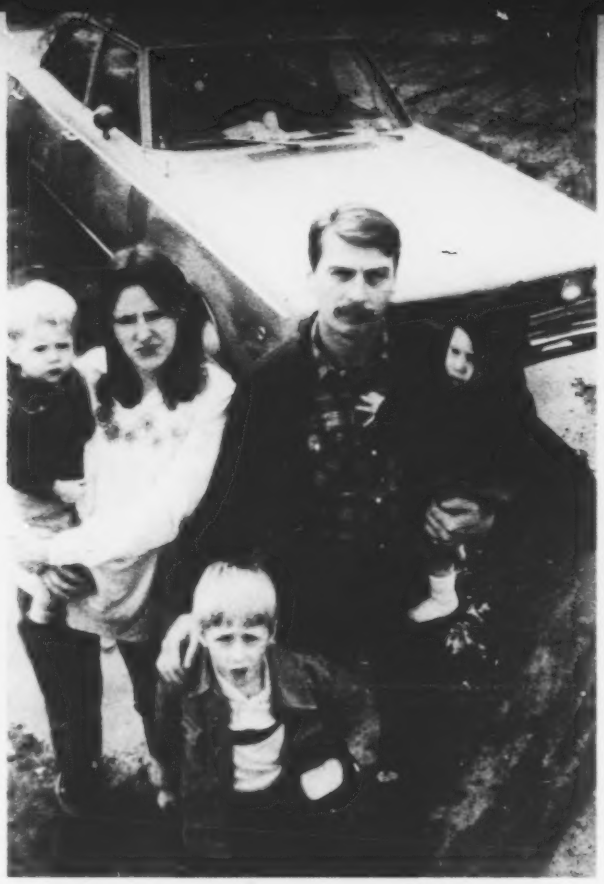

State Legislative Leaders:

Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families

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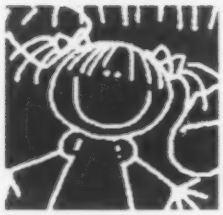

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"An agenda that involves children's issues is a surefire vote winner. It is curious that such an inherently positively-received issue is not on the front burner—that the jets aren't turned up real high on children's issues, because once those issues are explained, it is a categorical truth that people will embrace them and try to move them and identify with candidates who are excited about them."

Excerpt from interview with house speaker for this project

"The solution of adult problems tomorrow depends in large measure upon the way our children grow up today. There is no greater insight into the future than recognizing when we save our children, we save ourselves."

Margaret Mead, anthropologist

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface i

Acknowledgements iv

Summary vi

I. Introduction 1

- A. The Need to Engage State Legislative Leaders
- B. Project Goals
- C. Polling and Survey Strategy
- D. Profile of the State Legislative Leaders Interviewed
- E. The Impact of the 1994 Elections: A Changing Landscape

II. State Legislative Leaders 7

- A. Duties and Responsibilities
- B. The Role of Legislative Leaders in the State Budget Process

III. Legislative Leaders: Sources of Information 11

IV. Who Should Take Care of the Children? The Leaders' Perspective 14

- A. Defining the Issues
- B. Perceptions on the Status of Children and Families
- C. Role of Government

V. Advocates for Children and Families 18

- A. Survey Research Methodology/Profile
- B. Findings

VI. The Leaders' Perceptions of Advocates for Children and Families 22

VII. How to Succeed in the State Capitol (The Leaders' View) 27

VIII. Conclusion 31

IX. Endnotes 34

X. Appendices 35

A. Steering and Policy Committee Membership
B. Methodology for State Legislative Leaders Interviews
C. Sample Letter to Legislative Leaders
D. Methodology for Advocate Survey

PREFACE

The idea for this project originated just as the last national recession was ending in 1991. Until that time, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation had seen its primary mission as being a dispassionate educational resource for state legislative leaders.[1] Our chief goal was to provide these men and women with up-to-date, objective and comprehensive information and training on contemporary public policy issues and aspects of leadership. Our strategy was to identify a major policy issue—health care, education, telecommunications, environmental risk assessment — and then work with a prominent university, researching and developing a curriculum that examined the given issue through the prism of state government and, particularly, state legislatures.

We always understood that the national recession was placing a tremendous burden on the resources of state governments. Economic stagnation translates into deficits and then into budget cuts. What we did not appreciate, however, was the fact that these cuts, while adversely affecting nearly all segments of society, were having their most damaging impact on children and families. Perhaps we intuitively knew this but it was not something we seriously contemplated. Our attitude then could best be characterized as passive empathy. We cared, period.

All this changed in late 1991 when we decided to take a closer look at children and families in America. What we discovered astonished us. Statistics compiled by The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Book, information supplied to us by the United Ways, and in-depth follow-up discussions with state legislative leaders, academicians and advocates for children and families, painted a grim portrait. The recession was hurting children and families in America in a big way. The richest country in the world was doing a lousy job taking care of its most prized resources.

Better informed, we took our next steps rapidly. We began work on this project with the counsel and support of many individuals and organizations far more expert in the field of social policy than we. Our earliest meetings were with members of the faculty at Yale University's Child Study Center where we took our ideas about getting state legislative leaders directly involved with child and family issues and tested them on these eminent practitioners. What soon became apparent was that there is a dearth of comparative information on how state legislative leaders actually think about child and family issues. "How do state legislative leaders define child and family issues, and how do they form their opinions?" "To whom do they turn for information and why?" "What do they think can be done for kids and how do we do it?" "What should be the responsibility of state legislative leaders toward addressing the pressing needs of children and families." And finally, enveloping all these questions, "Why state legislative leaders?" "What role could they play in advancing the agenda for children and families?" These were some of the fundamental questions that originally guided our research design.

As the following pages will describe, to answer these questions we developed a plan that brought us into direct contact with 177 state legislative leaders from

all 50 states. We also surveyed a cross-section of child and family organizations to learn more about their advocacy efforts and particularly, how they view and interact with the state legislative process.

What we present in this report is a portrait of state legislative leaders that describes not only their perceptions and views about children and families and those advocates who speak for them, but also the leaders' innermost convictions and beliefs about the role of state government. The frank and unvarnished first-person observations offered by these legislative leaders will give the reader a unique "feel" for just who they really are. And while not nearly so comprehensive, our survey of child and family organizations, and our closer correspondence with several of these groups, has given us valuable insights about their advocacy philosophies and the way they choose to conduct their missions.

Though it was unanticipated, the timing of this study could not have been better. The results of the 1994 national state and local elections have dramatically altered the political landscape. At the heart of the message in the Contract with America is a call for a fundamental shift in power and responsibility from the federal government to the states and a redefining of the role of government. If this does not portend the coming of a social revolution in America, it at least signals the reopening of the debate on many fundamental public policy issues that define our society.

The impact of this report will depend largely on what the State Legislative Leaders Foundation does with what we have learned. We believe that state legislative leaders can be extremely helpful in addressing the burgeoning needs of children and families. But we also believe that gaining their support will require many significant changes both on the part of those who advocate for children and families and equally on the part of the state legislative leaders themselves.

For state legislative leaders to provide the needed leadership on this most critical of social issues, they must be made (and make themselves) better informed about the true nature and severity of the problems facing children and families and the remedies that can be applied using the levers of government. This cannot be a passive experience, however. Once state legislative leaders have become fully cognizant of the situation, they must become pro-active and move to seize the initiative, mobilize support and push for solutions. As Harvard Professor Ronald Heifetz puts it in his most recent book on leadership, [leaders must] "tackle tough problems, problems that often require an evolution of values — [this] is the end of leadership: getting the work done is its essence."[2]

This call for a more pro-active leadership will require an old-fashioned view of enlightened public service–elected officials as the stewards of the public trust, driven by a vision of the common good that supercedes the loudest voices.

Because children cannot raise their own concerns, legislative leaders must, asking everyone who comes through their doors—lobbyists, civic leaders, professionals, constituents—"How are children faring in your community?" "How will this legislation affect children and families?" "What can we do?"

One final observation. The critical needs of so many children and families, coupled with the cascading adverse effects their unmet needs are having on our society would seem enough to drive state legislative leaders to the forefront of the debate.
Yet simply calling for state legislative leaders to rise to the challenge and become more pro-active—no matter how compelling the evidence—denies the political realities that shape and govern state legislative leadership behavior. At their very heart, state legislative leaders are process-oriented men and women. Most of them were elected to their positions in leadership because of their talents as managers, fundraisers, negotiators and skilled parliamentarians. Becoming more pro-active on issues of children and families—or on any major public policy issue is simply not a traditional part of their job description. This does not mean that we should not seek ways of engaging these leaders more directly in the debate about how best to serve the myriad needs of children and families. The stakes are simply too high and their influence over the entire legislative process is too great. Rather, what the reader must recognize is that the responsibility for getting state legislative leaders more involved will continue to rest with those organizations and individuals who are concerned about children and families.

Also, as our advisors have insisted in many meetings, strengthening the capacities of those who advocate for children and families will require a fundamental reassessment by those who fund these advocacy groups and who often inadvertently create unnecessary barriers to their grantees' effective interaction with the legislatures. The philanthropic community must revisit its reluctance to fund effective outreach and education to legislative leaders and those the leaders rely upon for information–business and opinion leaders. In conjunction with this, foundations must help nonprofits understand what they can and cannot do within the boundaries of their nonprofit status to help these same legislative leaders become more informed and engaged on behalf of the issues they support.

A concluding note. My closest colleague in this endeavor has eloquently expressed her and our appreciation to the many individuals and organizations whose encouragement and support have made this project a success. I only wish to add my personal words of thanks for Margaret Blood's dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism. She knows the subject exceedingly well and she understands as few do, the role state government plays in shaping our lives.

Stephen G. Lakis, President
State Legislative Leaders Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the wise counsel and generous support of an extraordinary team of collaborators.

First, our funders who had the vision to recognize that state legislative leaders are an important part of the equation in developing sound public policy for children and families. Our special appreciation to Kathleen Feely, Gibby Halloran and Janice Nittoli of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Janice Molnar and Reggie Lewis of the Ford Foundation for their leadership and counsel throughout this project.

We also wish to thank the members of our Steering and Policy Committee. They have given this project countless hours, not only attending working meetings, but also reviewing and assisting us in refining and editing this report. They have challenged our assumptions, raised important issues and in the process, made us far better informed about the complexities surrounding any discussion of children and families.

Another integral part of our team is our pollsters, John Deardourff, Dick Bennett and Paul Maslin. Their professionalism, exceptional interpersonal skills and genuine commitment to the goals of this project have provided us with a rich body of data far exceeding our most optimistic hopes. We suspect they now know more about state legislative leaders than any team of pollsters in the country!

We also want to express our appreciation to the following organizations and individuals, all of whom contributed in some significant way to this project: Bill Harris of KidsPac who has been with us all the way and who continues to be a source of inspiration and encouragement; Susan Bales of the Benton Foundation and the Coalition for America's Children - thank you for your insights on advocacy and leadership; Jean Adnopoz and Cynthia Farrar of Yale University - the focus of this project on collecting data about how legislative leaders define and understand child and family issues grew out of our discussions with you and your colleagues at the Child Study Center at Yale; Lucy Hudson of the Center for the Study of Social Policy for your continued counsel throughout this project; Judith Weitz, currently a consultant to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities for programs for at-risk children - we have benefitted tremendously from your sharp editorial pen and clear understanding of where politics intersect with children and families; Eve Brooks of the National Association of Child Advocates whose early reviews of our study were invaluable. And Marty Linsky, who provided insights on the legislative process and what makes a legislator a leader.

And thanks to many friends and organizations: Terry Ann Lunt, Freddie Fuentes and Melissa Ludkte for the gift of their continued support, friendship and expert assistance with this document; Daphne Sarcia of the Department of Pediatrics at Boston City Hospital; Sharon Ladin of the Children's Defense Fund; Mark Riley of the Child Welfare League of America; Susan Wolfson of the Massachusetts Legislative Children's Caucus; Dr. Barry Zuckerman, Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Boston City Hospital; and the National Conference of State Legislatures. Each has given us valuable words of encouragement, fresh insights and in the case of NCSL, further help with access to state legislative leaders.

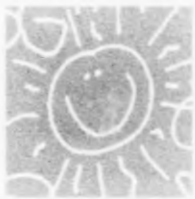
We also thank the staff of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, each of whom has contributed good sense and countless hours of review; Debbie Haigh, who helped with every facet of this project; David Wargin and Marcia VanderVoort for their expert assistance in reviewing the final report; and Jack Crompton for art direction and design. They are quite simply the very best.

As to the subjects of our report itself, we thank the 167 advocates for children and families who took the time and thought to complete the mail survey for this project. Although time and finances would not permit us to talk to each of them personally, we were able to learn a great deal about their goals and aspirations and their frustrations. We thank you for your candor and for sharing with us your perspectives.

And finally, we extend our appreciation to each of the 177 state legislative leaders who were willing to be interviewed for this project and who graciously gave their time and shared their candid thoughts with our pollsters. Without their willingness to speak with us, this project would never have happened.

Stephen G. Lakis, President
State Legislative Leaders Foundation

Margaret A. Blood, Project Director
Children and Families Program
State Legislative Leaders Foundation



OVERVIEW

In 1993, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, with the support of the Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations, launched this research project, *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families.* This report documents the findings of this project which involved 177 of the country's most influential Republican and Democratic state legislative leaders from all 50 states. Over the course of more than a year, these leaders were interviewed by a bi-partisan team of pollsters on a wide range of issues related to children and families. As part of this project, we also surveyed, by detailed written questionnaire, 167 child and family organizations that participate in state-based legislative activity. The responses and comments of these organizations have served as a frame of reference against which we have compared and contrasted the views of the state legislative leaders.

To provide ongoing guidance and counsel to this study, we organized a 21-member Steering and Policy Committee. The members of this Committee included academicians, state legislative leaders, child and family advocates, and representatives from the funding foundations.[3] The State Legislative Leaders Foundation staff met regularly with the Committee and spoke individually with its members, sharing information as it was developed, discussing the implications of our findings, and finally, collaborating on the content and distribution of the final report.

What follows is an outline of our principal findings based on the key points state legislative leaders made, data on state legislative advocacy practices, and our own independent professional judgment shaped by over four decades of combined experience working with legislatures and state legislative leaders.

KEY FINDINGS

1) The primary focus of state legislative leaders is on managing the legislative process and on the state budget. However, with term limits and increased party competition, legislative leaders are increasingly speaking out on major public policy issues.

2) Child and family issues are generally important to state legislative leaders. However, their importance varies from state to state and leader to leader.

3) State legislative leaders learn anecdotally about issues and not systematically, so their knowledge is often not national or statewide, but limited to what goes on in their districts and what others bring to their attention. Still, our interviews show that most state legislative leaders are not familiar with how children and families are faring in their districts or in their states. They are not informed about the policies and programs that "work" or the evidence of their impact in making a difference in children's lives.

4) In the eyes of state legislative leaders, there is no clear discernible legislative agenda for children and families. Instead, there is a plethora of individuals and organizations advocating differ-

ent agendas for children and families. The leaders get mixed and sometimes contradictory messages.

5) To state legislative leaders, groups that advocate for children and families appear to be "liberal" and Democratic. Increasingly, the leadership in state legislatures is "moderate" and "conservative" and Republican. The political ground has shifted and those who advocate for children and families must shift as well.

6) State legislative leaders are unaware of any cohesive, effective grassroots constituency for children in their states. Generally they do not hear from their constituents on child and family public policy issues.

7) Leaders understand the roles of lobbyists, but most legislative leaders are not clear about the roles advocates play. Their own limited experience with advocates does not make them predisposed in many cases to work closely with them. They perceive advocates as "elitists" who view the legislative process and state legislators themselves with disdain or skepticism.

8) Some of the strategies legislative advocates for children and families view as important to their efforts are viewed by legislative leaders as irrelevant or counterproductive (e.g., "Children's Day" at the state house, large written reports and legislative "score cards" offered by organizations that are perceived to have little or no political clout).

9) Groups that advocate for children and families have not been provided the training, funding, and flexibility necessary to develop and implement sustained strategies essential to legislative success.

10) The need to engage state legislative leaders in the debate about children and families cannot rest solely with child and family advocates or philanthropic foundations. A significant measure of responsibility for action rests squarely on the state legislative leaders themselves. They must become decidely more pro-active with regard to investigating and seeking out information on child and family issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

the need • project goals • profile of leaders interviewed • impact of 1994 elections

A. The Need to Engage State Legislative Leaders

There is a growing yet nearly invisible campaign being waged throughout the United States. Unlike most campaigns, this one has no deadline for filing nomination papers. It has no high-priced team of prestigious political consultants or media buyers and it operates without a powerful finance committee. This campaign does not conclude on Election Day, for it is a never-ending effort being run for the nation's only constituency that cannot vote. The candidate in this campaign is the poorest group in America—our nation's children.

"Our nation's children under the age of three and their families are in trouble, and their plight worsens every day."

Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Children, Carnegie Corporation of America

In place of a well-oiled political machine, this campaign relies on thousands of dedicated volunteers and mostly underpaid professionals working in neighborhoods and communities in cities, towns and counties across the nation. Teachers, nurses, parents, Big Brothers, social workers, child care workers, Girl Scout leaders, pediatricians, nuns, priests, rabbis, pastors, attorneys, child psychiatrists, psychologists, business leaders and citizen volunteers—all working to help children and their families. They work with children and families one-on-one or as part of an organization, agency or coalition. Some provide a service; others work on public policy. Some work part-time, others seemingly day and night. What they lack in money and resources, they more than make up for in dedication.

Their campaign is being lost not because those who work for children and families lack dedication or effort—indeed, without their continuing efforts countless more children and families would fall behind. Instead, this campaign for children and families is faltering because our nation's political leadership has yet to be convinced that a crisis of considerable impact on America exists. Our nation's political leadership has yet to be engaged as full partners in the campaign to improve the prospects for American children and families.

While the other members of the team must still be brought to the table—the political strategists, media consultants, the "kitchen cabinet" and the influential finance committee—potential for solid and substantial change exists already in the communities that comprise the approximately 7500 state legislative districts in the United States. It is in these legislative districts where strategic action can and must be mobilized and made visible, if the interests of children and families are going to be on the agendas of our state legislative leaders.

This study shows how state legislative leaders seek to effectively manage a political process

shaped by competing interests of powerful forces. So long as that process excludes child and family advocates, pro-active state legislative leaders and legislators, legislative sessions will continue to conclude with the familiar lament that we, as a society, have failed again to devise wise public policy for our children and families.

Time is of the essence. In the short run, a demographic swell in the rise of the teen population has many concerned about a possible rise in pregnancies, drug abuse and teen violence. Also the "Baby Boomer" generation will soon leave their child-bearing years behind, leading to a possible shift in public attention toward the needs and concerns of mid-life and beyond. Nevertheless, the needs of children and families will persist and intensify, creating a potentially dangerous divergence between these growing, distinct demographic groups.

As historic changes are made in the governance of our country, the responsibility and authority for allocating limited public resources and developing sound public policies for children and families will rest increasingly with state governments. Effective partnerships between state legislative leaders and advocates are now more essential than ever to formulate and advance agendas to protect and promote the well-being of each future generation of children and their families.

B. Project Goals

This study was undertaken in recognition of the central role that state legislative leaders can play in improving the lives of our nation's children and families. Our goal has been to examine who these legislative leaders are—what motivates them, their role in the legislative process, how they view the issues of children and families, their perceptions of advocacy efforts on their behalf, and what they can do to improve the well-being of children and families in America. To this end, this report addresses the following issues:

- **How state legislative leaders perceive their unique roles**
- **How state legislative leaders define child and family issues**
- **State legislative leaders' understanding of the status of children and families in their states**
- **How state legislative leaders perceive the role of state government in the lives of children and families**
- **State legislative leaders' perceptions of advocacy efforts and their impact on the state legislative process**
- **Strategies for engaging state legislative leaders in the campaign to improve the well-being of children and families**
- **Recommendations for advancing the agenda for children and families in state legislatures**

State legislative leaders are a significant political force. We are convinced that if this country is to embrace its less fortunate and most vulnerable, and in doing so, protect and promote its own self-interest, it will require a full measure of their support. In turn, our nation's state legislative leaders themselves must rise to a new level of pro-active leadership—a leadership that seeks to make children and families a constant focus of government policy-making.

The greatest challenge confronting everyone who professes to care about our nation's children lies in the need to transform the will for inaction in a society that is, at best, ambivalent about the plight of its children, into a will for constructive action.

C. Polling and Survey Strategy

In developing the research design for this study, our first concern was the potential difficulty of engaging state legislative leaders in the complex and often divisive issues relating to children and families. With an expanding pool of seasoned political polling and public opinion research firms working in child and family policy arenas, we believed that a respected team of pollsters would possess the political acumen necessary to effectively reach these elected officials.

To gather the data, we elected to employ a bi-partisan team of pollsters. The Project Director interviewed ten polling and public opinion research firms, nine of whom submitted written proposals and bids to conduct the research for

Table 1: Profile of Interviewed Legislative Leaders by Party, Race & Gender

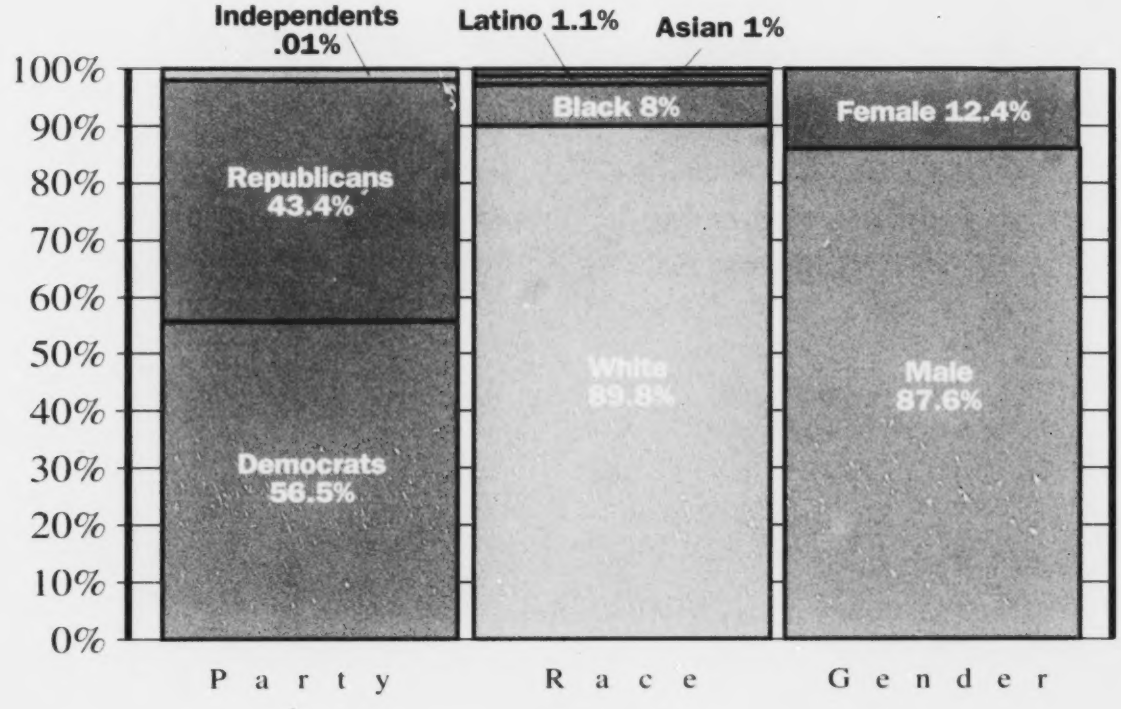
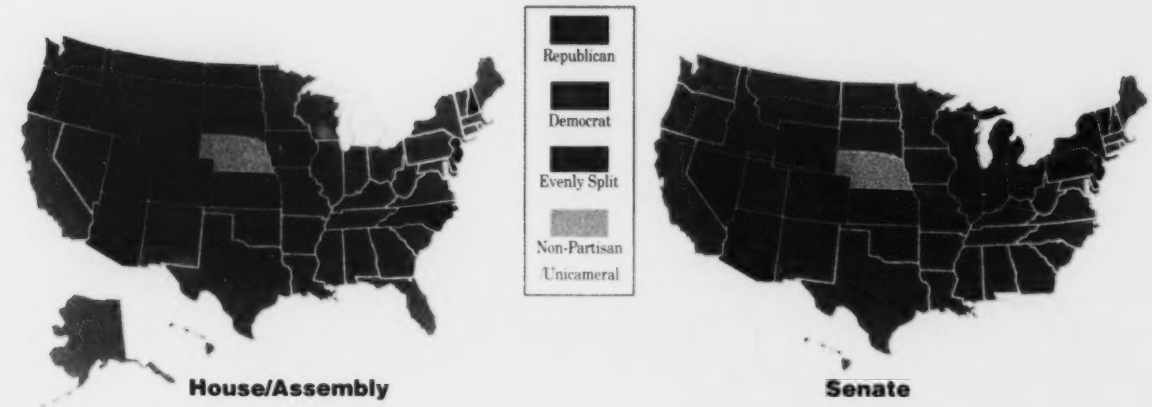


Table 2: Party Majority State-by-State Pre-1994 Elections



House/Assembly
Pre-1994 Elections

Senate
Pre-1994 Elections

the project. Each outlined different research methodologies including mail surveys, focus groups, telephone surveys and personal interviews. Early in 1994, the Foundation selected the Republican team of Bennett/Deardourff Opinion Research, with its principals Dick Bennett of New Hampshire and John Deardourff of Virginia, to serve as the lead polling firm for the project. The California-based firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates, with pollster Paul Maslin designated as the lead principal, was selected as the Democratic partner.

The pollsters, in conjunction with the State Legislative Leaders Foundation staff, decided that the most productive method for gathering the necessary information from the state legislative leaders would be through personal interviews.[4] Accordingly, throughout 1994, our pollsters conducted interviews with state legislative leaders across the nation in a variety of locations ranging from their state house offices to their business offices, from district offices to their homes. To keep pace with the leaders' hectic schedules, interviews were also arranged at state legislative programs and seminars sponsored by the State Legislative Leaders Foundation and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and in many less conventional settings—in churches, taxis, hotel lobbies, even out on the farm! While it was an extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming process, the data collected was rich far beyond our expectations. In total, a remarkable 177 interviews were finally completed.

All legislator interviews were granted on the basis of anonymity. This report, therefore, should not be construed as a state-by-state analysis or summary of the relationship between specific legislative leaders and the issues of children and families in their states. What the report does offer is a thorough, frank analysis of a representative body of state legislative leaders concerning their attitudes, perceptions and ideas about the status and issues of children and families.

D. Profile of State Legislative Leaders Interviewed

Of the 177 state legislative leaders interviewed for this project, slightly more than half (91) were members of the House or Assembly and 86 were members of the Senate. Interviews were conducted with more than half (54%) of the country's House and Assembly Speakers and nearly half (45%) of the Senate Presidents, along with dozens of House and Senate Majority and Minority Leaders and chairs of committees that handle child and family legislation.

Our survey also closely approximates the party, race and gender composition of the total number of state legislative leaders in office in 1994. Table 1 represents a profile of the state legislative leaders interviewed for this project.

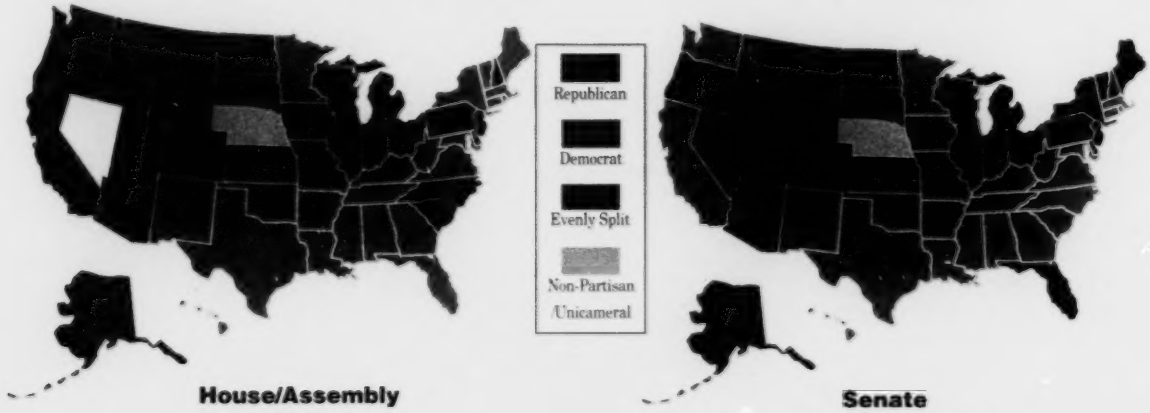
While their educational and occupational backgrounds vary greatly, most leaders report they have successfully transferred benefits of their occupational skills to their leadership positions. In describing how their occupations help them, leaders who are attorneys speak, for example, of their expert understanding and training in the lawmaking process, while those who come out of business speak of their familiarity with the free enterprise system. Although state legislatures are increasingly becoming more professionalized with the addition of trained staffs, new technologies and generally greater resources, many legislators in our survey group still view themselves as "citizen legislators." This characterization implies that by belonging to a part-time body, they are not professional politicians. In an age when "careerism" is frowned upon, many leaders take pride in the perception that they serve in citizen legislatures. As one leader commented:

"Citizen legislatures are a good thing because of all the occupations that are represented. Professional politicians don't have real contact with the real world through a job that puts the meat and potatoes on the table."

E. The Impact of the 1994 Elections: A Changing Landscape

This body of research is especially important considering the dramatic party turnover occasioned by the 1994 elections. As Tables 2 and 3 illustrate, prior to the elections, Democrats main-

Table 3: Party Majority State-by-State Post-1994 Elections



House/Assembly
Post-1994 Elections

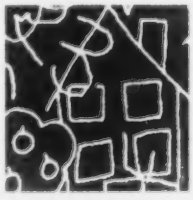
Senate
Post-1994 Elections

tained a clear edge in state legislatures, controlling 64 chambers, to Republicans' 31. (Three chambers were tied, and Nebraska's unicameral legislature is officially nonpartisan.) Today, Republicans control 50 chambers to Democrats' 46. (Two remain tied.) Instead of the eight states in which Republicans controlled both chambers in 1994, Republicans now hold the majority in both chambers in 19 states. The change in the political composition of our nation's governors is equally dramatic. The Democrats lost ten gubernatorial seats, dropping to 19, while Republicans gained ten seats and now occupy the Governor's office in 30 states. Finally, and equally significant, nearly half of all state legislative leaders are new to their positions.[5]

Reverberations from the Republican party's return to power in the United States Congress for the first time in 40 years are being felt by state governments throughout the country. Change at the national level is clearly influencing the way in which business is being conducted in state legislatures as more powers to control resources are returned to the states.

These dramatic changes in the political landscape of America promise to influence future public policy-making in virtually every area, including how government chooses to define and address the needs of children and families. It can be argued that the opportunity to mobilize state legislative leaders on behalf of children and families will improve as the role of state government evolves and as state legislative leaders become more pro-active and sophisticated in their efforts "to inform and persuade the public on matters of policy...." [6] However, it is also at least as likely that political leaders may interpret the public's message delivered at the polls and voting booths as a summons to further reduce the government's role in social policy-making.

These dramatic changes in the political landscape of America promise to influence future public policy-making in virtually every area, including how government chooses to define and address the needs of children and families.



II. STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS

duties and responsibilities • how they perceive their role in the legislative process • the state budget process

"Integrity is important. ...and the ability to get along with people. They have got to believe that you are telling the truth at all times."

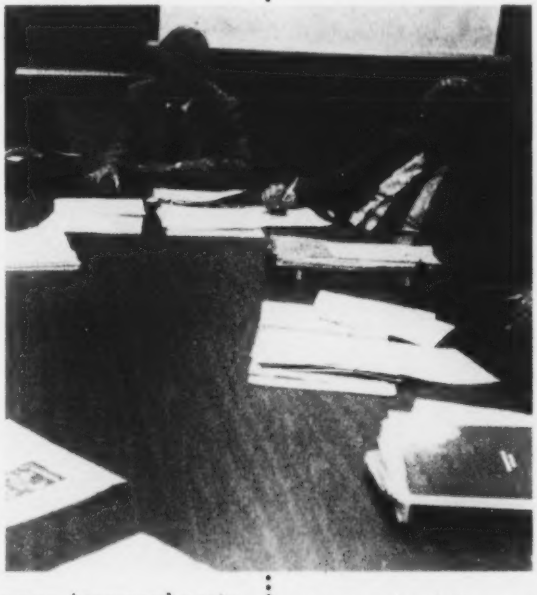
A. Duties and Responsibilities

There are three discrete categories of state legislative leadership: (1) Presiding officers defined as House Speakers, Senate Presidents and on occasion, Senate President Pro Tempores and Lieutenant Governors; (2) Majority Leaders, key committee chairs (usually Rules, Appropriations, Ways and Means and/or Taxation) and Deputy Majority Leaders and/or Majority Whips; and (3) Minority Leaders and their deputies and whips. Further complicating the definition of a state legislative leader is the fact that in several state legislatures, the committee chairs actually exercise more power than do the presiding officers.

In all instances however, state legislative leaders are vested with considerable implied and expressed powers. In many legislatures the presiding officers make committee appointments, staff assignments, control the legislative calendar and shape the legislative agenda. In other legislatures the duties and responsibilities of leadership are more diffuse. Appointment powers reside in party caucuses and/or bi-partisan management committees which oversee professional staff and the administration of the legislature. Similarly, other leaders of rank—majority leaders, key committee chairs and whips (assistants)—wield considerable power as floor managers, vote getters, chief lieutenants and policy experts.

Finally, minority leaders and other members of their leadership team play a crucial role in the

political debate, often forcing the majority party to consider other strategies and policies and constantly challenging the majority's assumptions. The ultimate goal of the minority leader and his/her leadership team is to present the members of the legislature and the public an alternative philosophy of governance which will be judged as more effective and more in keeping with the public's wants. The final measure of their success is victory at the polls.



Today, the role of the legislative leader is more complex than ever as leaders seek to balance the needs and often competing interests of a growing range of constituencies within and outside the legislature. Revenue, increased party competitiveness, term limits, the media–all these factors are having an impact on the role of state legislative leaders.

As Professor Thomas Little of the University of Texas notes:

"Legislative leadership in the modern era is a balancing act. On the one hand, today's legislative leaders must continue to give attention to traditional institutional responsibilities such as scheduling bills, appointing committees and leaders, and building legislative coalitions (Sinclair, 1983; Martin, 1987; Patterson, 1990; Palazzolo, 1992). On the other hand, these leaders are also expected to go beyond the legislative institution, representing the positions, interests and image of the legislature and its members to other external groups and policy activists (Loftus, 1985; Jeffe, 1987; Hardwick, 1987; Katz, 1987).[6]

Echoing these sentiments, one state legislative leader observed:

"The role is changing. We have an extremely different group of people– a generational shift. I have to be more inclusive and listen a lot and give everyone an opportunity to participate."

Yet even as responsibilities grow and expand, virtually all state legislative leaders continue to view their primary mission as building and maintaining working majorities and overseeing a productive legislative process. Although the emphasis differs from leader to leader, the nurturing of interpersonal relationships and the task of completing the legislature's work within its allotted time frame are principal preoccupations.

"Keep the party coordinated so we have a unified voice. Get the work done."

"Most of my time is spent helping other people solve their problems."

Many state legislative leaders cite chairing particular committees or personal interests as rea-

sons why certain issues have mattered to them, but most acknowledge that the demands of their current positions have made them generalists. Most state legislative leaders do not define their roles as promoting a particular public policy agenda. Instead, they describe themselves as being responsible for managing whatever the legislative process presents and in particular, getting the state budget passed:

> "My staff spends more time worrying about Mrs. Murphy's problem down at the Registry than they do about the issues of the day. They have to. If someone in my district has a problem, that gets solved first."

"I'm a manager. I manage the flow of legislation. I try to get my party's position across with respect to legislation."

"I used to have very specific policy interests, but now I manage the flow of thousands of bills and each bill that passes through here is important to someone."

The style of leadership which relied on rule by fear, common in many state legislatures when today's leaders began their legislative careers, is no longer acceptable as a means of advancing through the ranks. Nor does it keep leaders on top or move the legislative process forward. As the leaders themselves explained:

"I am not a dictator. You don't get anything accomplished that way. Those days are over in the legislature. The legislators are more sophisticated."

"I am very much a consensus-builder. I spend my time bringing people together. I'm not one to pull people only in my direction."

Of the attributes and abilities necessary to do their jobs, the leaders offer the following specifics:

"Patience and the ability to listen. Getting along with my peers."

"Build consensus. You must compromise, but not your philosophy or ideals. Concentrate on what's doable."

"I have the ability to sit down with all the factions on an issue and bring them together."

"People view me as being fair and reasonable."

"Motivation. Persistence. Collaboration."

B. The Role of Legislative Leaders in the State Budget Process

The state budget bill, the single most important item on any legislative calendar, serves as the policy document for the states by defining annual fiscal priorities. Every legislature has substantial authority over the final shape of the state budget and state legislative leaders in particular exert tremendous influence over the entire budget process.

"Ninety percent of all this stuff boils down to budget decisions. You have to be in on the budget process, close to the people who ultimately decide."

"It is my job to put the budget together in the House. Of course that is where the power is because that is where the money is. If you control the spending, you control everything else."

"I don't care what anyone says. We have 1,400 bills and the fact is that it all comes down to the budget. I think the legislature sets the priorities for that money."

"Ninety percent of all this stuff boils down to budget decisions. You have to be in on the budget process, close to the people who ultimately decide."

"The budget lets me set the agenda for the House. The final budget shows if I was able to concentrate on the issues I thought were important. If I can get the spending for the things I am interested in, then it was a good budget and a good session."

III. LEGISLATIVE LEADERS: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

how they get information and from whom • how leaders learn about child and family issues • the impact on policy

Language is the primary tool of leadership and legislative leaders depend on the spoken word far more than the written report.[7] State legislative leaders most always have exceptional listening and verbal skills and they generally rely on briefings from individuals rather than reading reports and publications for their information. Only a few legislative leaders express familiarity with current research relating to children and families. Some have "seen" reports concerning children, but rarely have read them and were unable to provide any detail concerning the content of reports they have seen. To underscore this point, only one legislative leader interviewed for this study indicated any familiarity with the national *Kids Count Data Book*.

Legislative leaders' intricate web of information sources includes legislative and executive branch staff, legislative colleagues including former legislators, family members, clergy, influential members of their community, lobbyists and a wide array of recognized experts including those who advocate for children and families.

It is hardly a surprise to learn that for political people, personal relationships matter a great deal. This is, after all, a profession that thrives and depends on loyalty and friendship. To the extent that someone else is able to influence or affect them, it is often someone they know very well and who has earned their trust. Perhaps no political maxim is more universally held by elected officials than the candid observation offered by one leader that *"All politics is personal and you finally get down to helping your friends."*

"I don't rely on any one person for advice. I have a bunch of people I rely on."

"The Speaker. The Majority Leader. My wife. My predecessor, who is now a lobbyist."

While the size and scope of legislative staffs vary from state to state, few leaders indicate that any of their staff members address or focus exclusively on child and family issues. The leaders' staff tend to be more focused on constituent services and other activities than on issue-related work:

"If a doctor or lawyer in my district cares enough to write me a letter or give me a call, then I know they care about the issue and I pay attention to what they have to say."

"One of the things we legislators don't do enough of is get educated as much as we ought to because we spend all of our time doing other things..."

In the absence of issue-oriented staffs of their own, legislative leaders turn to a variety of other sources for information. In particular, legislative leaders frequently turn to their committee chairs for guidance in a specific policy area:

"If you have placed the right people on committees and if a committee has spent a month looking at an issue, then you've got to give them credit and support their decision."

"As a leader, I put great faith in the committee system."

"The power of the legislature rests in the committee process."

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In slightly more than a majority of state legislatures, specific legislative committees or commissions are devoted exclusively to the issues of children and/or families.[7] However, the leaders' perceptions of the impact and significance of these committees and commissions vary. In some states, leaders appoint key members of their leadership team to chair these child and family-focused committees and subsequently afford them a great deal of authority, visibility and responsibility. In other states, the leaders view these committees as relatively powerless, as they are often led by legislators who are not perceived to be particularly influential or successful. In state legislatures that do not have legislative committees exclusively devoted to the interests of children and families, the leaders do not generally believe the creation of such an entity would be helpful. In these states the leaders report that the issues are adequately addressed by the existing committee structure.

> "One of the things we legislators don't do enough of is get educated as much as we ought to because we spend all of our time doing other things..."

Legislative leaders indicate that one way for them to learn about the issues is to see for themselves how many children and families live. Leaders clearly prefer relying on their own judgments and assessments rather than solely on what is offered in detailed reports. As one leader noted:

"As legislators we all need to be better educated about the problems of today's children. As the Senate leader, I'm going to try to take our members in small groups to see how different life is in, for example, an Hispanic school in the city, rather than in their more rural home districts; take them to see what's really happening out there, in the hope that some of the stereotypes can be torn away and that seeing the problems first hand will create more empathy, more understanding on the part of the legislature. Information and education—and real life exposure—can be powerful tools and I want to put them to use."

When asked about the media as a source of information and influence, the leaders draw clear distinctions between the impact the media have on them individually and the impact the media have on issues. Not unexpectedly the leaders report they do not like being attacked in the media. But they also expressed the view that the media do not dominate the legislative process with respect to child and family issues:

"...we've got to change our approach, both for humanitarian reasons and for the fiscally-conservative reason. Prevention has to be the answer."

"Legislative Leaders have a profound interest in maintaining the independence of the legislature... our dealings with the press are important to the legislative leaders but they are not the only constituency leaders have to deal with."

"The print press can be influential from time to time in laying out some of the problems. A stark crime of neglect or something like that gets people's attention for a while, but without follow-through it doesn't amount to much."

In a similar vein, state legislative leaders believe the media's penchant for sensationalism, particularly in television coverage, often distorts facts and leads the public to wrongly accuse government of failure to act.

"Is it government's fault when a father beats his kid to death? I don't think so, but the newspapers and especially the television stations want people to believe that. Maybe that kind of sensational coverage is helping, but I don't think so."

Notwithstanding these sentiments, the leaders do acknowledge that media coverage can influence public opinion, which in turn, prompts legislators to act on issues that otherwise might have remained untouched. The current push for welfare reform is a case in point.

IV. WHO SHOULD TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN?—THE LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

how leaders define the issues • their perceptions of the status of children and families • who should take care of children and families

A. Defining the Issues

There is no clear consensus among state legislative leaders on what constitutes child and family issues or on the severity of the problems facing children and families. Regardless of party affiliation, when asked to identify children's issues, those most commonly mentioned by the leaders are education, followed by child abuse and neglect. Yet while many leaders feel that education is clearly a children's issue, an equal number do not classify it that way, treating it as a key budget issue that involves children but cannot be defined solely in those terms.

"[In my state] education comprises 80% to 90% of the [total] budget. That makes it the biggest issue."

"On my own radar screen, when somebody says children's issues it's soft and mushy."

Among the other children's issues, Democratic leaders commonly mentioned problems of poor or disadvantaged children in their states, identifying children's issues in terms of poverty, income gaps, health problems or a general lack of opportunity. Other leaders, primarily Republicans, concentrate on the failures of the public welfare system or the state to provide adequate incentives for families and children.

There is a great deal of concern expressed by the leaders about the impact on children of growing up in more violent, crime-ridden environments, including the increased content of violence in music, on television and at the movies. Although young children (generally under the age of six) are still perceived more as victims than perpetrators of crime, many leaders believe that today's environment is contributing to an increased incidence of violent acts committed by youths.

> Owing to their often nostalgic recollections of growing up poor but in strong traditional families, a number of leaders feel the responsibility for taking care of today's children must rest at home with parents, and not with government.

Numerous leaders, particularly Republicans and conservative Democrats, link these issues to the need for more latitude to try juveniles as adults in the criminal justice system. Others are just as likely to identify children's issues in terms of efforts to beef up child-support enforcement. Very few leaders identify housing, welfare and health care strictly as children's issues.

B. Perceptions on the Status of Children and Families

Many leaders are aware that the situation for children and families is far worse today than it was in their youth:

"Children face more difficult problems today than when I was growing up. Certainly the drug problem and the breakdown of the family have made it more difficult to have a sense of family. The freer sexual mores create problems for children. The out-of-wedlock children are disproportionately the 'problem children' down the line, more likely to drop out of school, to have drug problems, to live in poverty, to be involved in crime. The support systems for children, many children, have broken down."

But there are also those who believe things aren't too bad for most children in their states or that the situation is generally improving:

"Most kids do very, very well. Kids are smarter, they are exposed to more and sometimes that's a concern because they know more about more things than I might have. This puts much greater stress on the kids and their families."

"In terms of legislation to deal with the problems, children in our state are better off than they were five to ten years ago....Our goal is to be the first state to fully fund Headstart. And we're working to better coordinate the existing services available to poor children, poor families. That's a bipartisan effort."

Though many leaders are not keenly aware of the actual status of children and families in their states, there are some who clearly recognize the need to help. These leaders explained:

"Legislators are too worried about the next election and not the next generation. I'm worried about the children in my district who need help... and they're not getting it."

"Things have always been bad for [at] risk kids in our state. I can't say they're getting worse, but they certainly aren't getting better, and all this talk about cutting off aid to teenage mothers, or single moms on welfare, will only hurt innocent children even more."

Some leaders, aware of the challenges and dangers facing children, express doubt about their ability to intervene in a positive way. Leaders speak of a lost generation of children, their inability to help this generation and what they believe is a monumental task of preventing another generation from being lost as well.

In the minds of some leaders the greatest potential for helping children and families rests in prevention and programs for young children:

"I'm not sure there's much we can do for those kids over 12, or over ten. We may already be too late. But if we start with the idea that with the next generation of kids we can do something, then we will indeed have made a difference and that's what I'm interested in."

"...unless we do something we will lose another generation of poor kids growing up in hopeless situations."

"If you wait until severe trouble, you wait too long. We do that too much. We need more prevention."

"If we don't insure that children have a chance in the world, then we have a real problem on our hands."

"We have a problem, in terms of children, of epidemic proportions. It needs the same approach we took with two earlier major epidemics, polio and tuberculosis. We weren't

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content just to build more polio hospitals, more TB sanitariums. We said we've got to put more emphasis on the front end, we've got to change our approach, both for humanitarian reasons and for the fiscally-conservative reason. Prevention has to be the answer."

C. Role of Government

Though there may be differences in how Republicans and Democrats define child and family issues, leaders from both parties believe that children have been harmed by the "breakdown of the family," lack of adequate parenting and the absence of intergenerational family supports such as those that existed when they were young. Explained one leader:

"Too many couples are more committed to an economic lifestyle than they are committed to their kids, and then they want somebody else to deal with the problems that lack of commitment creates. The hedonism, or materialism, of young parents who themselves lack value training from their parents is what's creating problems for their children. And then these parents want to pass those problems on to the government. It won't work. We need a safety net, we need Headstart and Medicaid and other programs, but ultimately they will not be the answer. It's like giving kids a few carrots when they need a full meal."

With very few exceptions, legislative leaders seem to believe state and local governments are doing their fair share for children and families. In general, most legislative leaders believe the problems facing children are not the result of too little money being spent on them by state governments. As evidence, they most often cite the amount of public funding being spent on primary and secondary education, on welfare (AFDC), on child health services and nutrition programs:

"The responsibility of government is to make sure all children have environments that are safe and productive—from home to education to health care. We are meeting that responsibility for the vast majority of children in our state. For the other children, we are primarily responsible for the safety net and we work the hardest with the middle-level of the departments to find the best way to make the safety net work."

The interviews clearly revealed that the leaders' personal childhood experiences strongly influenced their present-day thinking about the issues of children and families. Most of the older leaders tend to describe themselves as growing up poor, working class, or lower middle class, though they did not explicitly think of themselves as poor during their childhood. These leaders believe that, while their families were poor, things weren't all that bad because their families were together, their communities were safe and no one let them lose faith in a better future. Many of these leaders are quick to acknowledge that growing up poor when they did and growing up poor today pose entirely different situations for children. As one leader explained:

"We had nine kids on a farm with no money. But it was okay. Everyone was the same. Now it's terribly different. Kids are paddling hard, but swimming upstream."

Yet, perhaps owing to their often nostalgic recollections of growing up poor but in strong traditional families, a number of leaders feel the responsibility for taking care of today's children

must rest at home with parents, and not with government. Many leaders feel government, when it has tried to help, has failed. Thus, for these leaders, expanding the role of government will not eliminate the problems. Often these legislators point to the welfare system as the most obvious example of well-intentioned failure. As several leaders explained:

"The primary responsibility has to be the parents, the family. Government has too often, unintentionally, played a negative role. I'm a strong critic of the current welfare system, because I think it has taken away individual responsibility; it's rewarded bad behavior - made it more beneficial not to work than to work, more beneficial to have children out-of-wedlock than not to, more beneficial not to get married than to get married. Those are all bad incentives."

"... Government does not seem to do a good job taking care of kids."

"The overwhelming number of high achievers come from intact two-parent families where both parents are the biological parents of the child. Stable families and academic achievement are closely linked. Our high divorce rate and the staggering level of out-of-wedlock births are destroying our social fabric. These are the things that are hurting kids so badly and I am not clear that government programs can do a great deal unless those trends are reversed."

Finally, several leaders expressed the belief that the religious sector should do more to help. One leader commented:

"The churches of America have got to get back in the 'kid business.' Government will not solve this problem with dollars and programs; the major religious denominations have got to take care of their neighborhoods and their communities. Collectively they can make a difference. Unfortunately, the major denominations have become lobbyists rather than kid-servers... only the churches in the neighborhood can pick up and parent those kids."

When asked about their most pressing concern(s) for the 1995-96 session, a majority of leaders said that matching needs and requests for spending to inadequate revenues would be the most difficult challenge. The leaders explained:

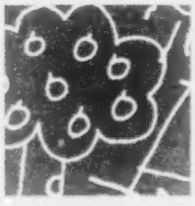
"There are so many things that I would like to do in the next two years, but there is no way that we can afford them and be responsible at the same time."

"People in our state think they are over-taxed. The truth is we rank about 44th among all states in per capita state taxation. Yet it's extremely hard to pass new revenue measures."

"Governors generally believe that anyone who can afford it can have it. My spending agenda for the next session is that everyone should share in any cuts that have to be made. Choosing between competing programs when you have the funds is much more fun than having to make cuts in existing programs."

"With the difficult economic situation in the state, there are a lot of things you would like to do. You just have to decide how much you are willing to pay for, and it is a continuing problem to make those decisions."

"There used to be a better chance outside the budget to fund programs, but not now."



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V. Advocates for Children and Families

survey research methodology • profile • analysis of survey findings • the leaders' perceptions

A. Survey Research Methodology/Profile

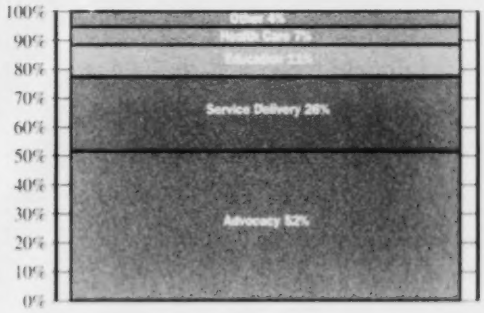
To gain a better understanding of how advocates for children and families perceive and interact with state legislative leaders and the legislative process, we developed a 50-state list of 434 groups identified as "advocates" by three of the nation's leading child and family advocacy organizations—the Children's Defense Fund, the National Association of Child Advocates and the Coalition for America's Children (through the auspices of the Benton Foundation).

Our sample included: multi-issue, non-profit, independent, citizen-based advocacy groups who receive little or no public funds and are not direct service providers; organizations which are state-based affiliates and/or allies of the Children's Defense Fund; and providers of services to children and families including children's hospitals and child-care centers.

Each of these groups was mailed an eight-page survey especially developed for this project. The survey and follow-up telephone calls revealed that of the 434 organizations, 284 said they performed legislative activities at the state level. The remaining 150 stated that they did not engage in state legislative activities, choosing instead other avenues for influencing policy for children and families. Of the remaining 284 groups, a total of 167 (59%) returned questionnaires. These 167 included organizations from all 50 states.

The size of the paid staffs of the surveyed organizations ranged from none to 4,000. Those organizations who had "no or few" staff tended to be volunteer organizations and coalitions of child and family groups; those few who reported staffs of hundreds tended to be providers of specific services such as health care, child care and early childhood education. Almost all the organizations that reported advocacy as their primary mission operate with very few staff members statewide, and among these groups, it was the executive director who spent most or part of his/her time working to influence legislation.

Table 4:
"Primary Missions" According to Advocacy Respondents

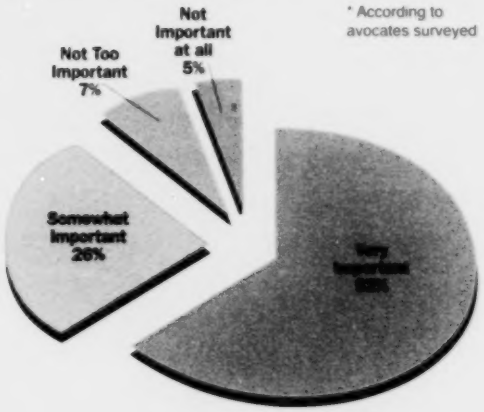


B. Findings

Among the 167 organizations who responded to our survey, 52% reported that advocacy was the primary mission of their organization, while 26% identified their organizations as service providers. Most of the remaining groups reported their missions as education, health care and data collection. Approximately 60% of the 167

respondents reported their efforts to influence the legislative process directly were very important in performing the mission of their organizations.

Table 5:
Advocates' Efforts to Influence Legislation in Performing Mission*



Nearly all of the child and family groups (98%) said contacts between their members and state legislators would be beneficial in advancing their organization's agenda for children and families. Furthermore, 89% of the child and family organizations reported their board members were encouraged to develop contacts with legislators from their districts and 81% said their staff members were encouraged to develop contact with their legislators. However, with respect to grassroots efforts, nearly two-thirds said they neither organize supporters by their legislative districts nor organize supporters in the districts of key committee chairs.

An overwhelming 80% believed that increasing the number of full-time paid employees specifically assigned to work with legislators would improve the success rate of their organizations' legislative initiatives. Yet while most of these groups acknowledge the importance of spending more time working at the state legislative level, the majority of respondents said they were reluctant to do so.

Of the 167 respondents, fully 80% reported their organizations faced some restrictions on directly influencing legislation. Only one in five indicated they faced no restrictions.

The lack of consensus over whether a legislative agenda is necessary or appropriate stems from several important factors. Some advocacy groups choose not to be involved in the political process because of long-held tradition. Many child and family organizations trace their activist roots to religious, volunteer and philanthropic groups, not to state government. They regard their work as separate from government.

For other groups the lack of contact with the legislative process is a question of priorities and limited financial resources. These groups are simply too immersed in day-to-day activities responding to the immediate and often critical needs of the children and families they serve. Although they might see a legislative strategy as desirable, it is simply beyond their current capacities to fashion and implement an effective one.

Still another factor affecting how legislative advocacy is conducted relates to how nonprofits interpret IRS regulations governing tax-exempt activities. Many nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations feel their ability to interact with the legislative process is circumscribed by IRS regula-

tions; thus they eschew most forms of legislative and political activity.

But perhaps the most significant reason is that many foundations will not support legislative advocacy and place restrictions on the use of funds for such purposes. Most child and family organizations do not have the capacity to raise other non-restricted funds necessary to underwrite a sustained and aggressive legislative advocacy program. These organizations are heavily dependent upon private foundations, which often impose restrictions that prohibit the recipients of their funding from engaging in legislative and political activity. The need for adequate, at least partially unrestricted, financial support is an issue frequently mentioned by those who responded to the surveys:

"Our legislators, even the best of them, address children's issues in terms of the adult standing next to the child, not in terms of the need of the child."

"My dream is to have funders who understand the importance of advocacy for children and families and that will provide 'advocacy dollars' instead of 'program dollars.' Advocates currently have to spend large amounts of time fundraising."

"...I think the key to greater success is (1) understanding how to get the public to pressure for children's programs and (2) money for the organizing to do so."

And finally, many who advocate on behalf of children and families are disappointed. The barriers to progress seem at times, insurmountable:

"I believe that legislators [in general] pay lip service to the priorities [of children and families], but there is no commitment to provide adequate resources to do the job."

"...Today I feel like nothing will ever be accomplished in [my state]. We just do not want to look at the problems facing children. Advocates need the tools to compete like the 'big boys.' Most do not see children as important!"

"Traditionally in [my state] the court mandates reform and the legislature refuses to fund it - time to try to change this."

"Our legislators, even the best of them, address children's issues in terms of the adult standing next to the child, not in terms of the need of the child."

Effective Lobbying: What the Legislative Leaders Say

The state legislative leaders were remarkably candid in their observations of what constitutes effective lobbying. In almost every interview, the legislative leaders drew comparisons between those who advocate for children and families and those who lobby for other groups they consider to be more effective. When asked to name the most effective lobbying operations in their states, invariably legislative leaders identify one of three groups—the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the National Rifle Association (NRA) and teachers unions.

The leaders report that these groups succeed because they generate broad-based political constituent participation which helps to advance the organization's strategic legislative agenda. These organizations possess the right combination of clear mission, pragmatic goals and sound marketing techniques, as well as carefully monitored government operations and grassroots constituency organizing. In particular, the leaders note that these groups:

- *Have lobbyists who work regularly in the capitols throughout the legislative session who are known to the legislative membership. The lobbyists for these groups are well trained "pros," whether volunteer or paid, who work effectively within the system.*

- *Represent large, visible constituencies with wide geographic dispersion throughout the state. There is a "grassroots" component in almost every state legislative district.*

- *Have members who are politically alert and active at the local level. They volunteer in political campaigns and are in contact with their elected officials "on demand" by telephone, mail and in person.*

- *Have well-defined goals that are clearly and persuasively communicated to their constituencies who in turn stay in touch with their legislators.*

- *Provide financial assistance to the campaigns of candidates who are supportive of their positions.*

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VI. THE LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

summary of leaders' views on advocacy • what works - what doesn't • why

It is important to underscore the fact that state legislative leaders exert tremendous influence over the entire legislative process. Though they may be generalists in terms of their understanding of issues, they nonetheless are fully capable of shaping and guiding public policies that affect children and families. Individuals and groups who advocate for children and families often appear to the state legislative leaders unwilling to do what needs to be done to be effective with state legislators. Leaders commented on the advocates' inability to focus on specific legislative efforts and their lack of understanding about how the legislative process works. Though leaders expressed a willingness—and for some a keen desire—to "help kids," few leaders felt their impetus to help would emanate from the efforts of the advocates.

> Republicans and conservative Democrats feel they are often ignored by children's advocates because their positions on many other social issues are in direct opposition to the positions held by many of the advocates.

While some state legislative leaders could name individual advocates, they were generally unfamiliar with groups .hat advocate for children and families or the groups' priorities and agendas. Yet though unable to identify advocacy groups by name, the leaders nonetheless had very strong perceptions about them.

What follows is a summary of the opinions and perceptions of the 177 state legislative leaders interviewed for this project. In addition, where it seemed necessary and appropriate, we have added our own analysis.

"Labels" and attitudes matter. The word "advocate" is not one which most state legislative leaders ever use, nor is it a word with which they are very familiar or feel comfortable. For many legislative leaders, the terms "advocate" and "advocacy" conjure images of individuals whom they regard with a certain amount of suspicion and disdain. Advocates appear to legislative leaders all too often to be people who view the entire legislative process skeptically.

It is important to recall that many of the leaders come from backgrounds they consider to be "poor" or "working-class." They are proud to serve as elected officials, having earned positions of prominence in their communities. As presiding officers, they are also in the unique position of having earned the respect and support of their legislative peers. They therefore often find

it difficult to work with advocates, whom they perceive as disrespectful of the legislative process and the leaders themselves. From the leaders' vantage point, many of these advocates come across as "intellectual elitists."

Professional lobbying skills are respected. Leaders emphasize the facts that common sense, effective interpersonal skills and the ability to compromise are the essential characteristics of those who succeed in influencing the legislative policy-making process. From the leaders' perspectives, advocates for children and families don't always demonstrate an appreciation or aptitude for these essentials. As they explain:

"Children's advocates should ask themselves: How do I get my children to do what I want them to do without getting into a big fight? It's the same here."

"I can't say that I have seen great success. They (advocates) show a naivete about the process, they can't see the other side of an argument, or they pick the wrong horse in the legislature."

"The best lobbyists are ones that bring you factual information on both sides of the issue and are willing and able to compromise on the issue."

Truly successful lobbyists, whether paid or volunteer, build reputations over a period of years for being reasonable, useful and trustworthy. The effectiveness of those who lobby (or advocate) is directly related to the effectiveness of the messenger and not just the message. In the eyes of many legislative leaders, the messenger on child and family issues is just not regarded as a "serious player."

"They [lobbyists] play a very important role. They show you the other side. They know the process, have a good means of communication one-on-one. They must know the process. They're ineffective if they just write letters and don't make the direct contact."

"I think that children's issues need professional lobbying and need a higher degree of activity."

While some leaders are able to identify an individual as a child and family advocate, very few leaders are able to name even one child and family advocacy organization in their state.

Child and family advocates are invisible to leaders. As noted, most state legislative leaders indicate they have very little direct contact with child and family advocates and are not familiar with any specific child and family advocacy groups in their states. While some leaders are able to identify an individual as a child and family advocate, very few leaders are able to name even one child and family advocacy organization in their state. As one leader commented:

"I try to listen to the advocacy groups, look at their information. To be honest, I can't tell you their names."

Leader after leader speaks of infrequent or no communication with advocates for children and families:

"The children's lobby does not have as strong a voice as it could. I hardly ever hear anything from them."

"We're not aware of their [children's] problems. They don't point it out to us. They're not doing it."

"In other areas of policy, there are powerful organized interests and individuals who will judge legislators and will keep them from oscillating so far. Not so much with children's issues. The number of people who walk the halls [in the state capitol] who even know these issues, much less care about them or are willing to advocate for them, is really depressing."

An ongoing presence in the state capitol offers distinct advantages. The proximity of advocacy groups' offices to their state capitals clearly plays a role in the ability of these groups to provide a continuous presence throughout the legislative session. While many lobbyists and special interest groups maintain offices within walking distance of their state houses, less than half of the groups surveyed for this project even had an office in the capital city.

Those leaders who express some familiarity with groups who advocate for children and families believe they lack a coordinated, manageable legislative agenda and well-defined goals. The leaders feel that at times these groups seem to be competing against one another and that such behavior ultimately hurts the advocates' efforts. The leaders commented:

Those leaders who express some familiarity with groups who advocate for children and families believe they lack a coordinated, manageable legislative agenda and well-defined goals.

"Most of my initiatives on children's issues have come because some individual with credibility came to me directly, someone I knew and trusted. A lot of the advocates who come up here and demonstrate don't have the credibility that gets them anywhere. They just come and make noise. They're for kids in the broadest sense, but when you try to narrow their focus to a specific piece of legislation, their members are all over the map. By contrast, a really effective advocacy organization is good at focusing in on a specific piece of legislation and commenting very articulately on it, and knows how the process works here. It's not just an exercise in doing good, it's pointed, it's effectively channeled."

"The elderly did it back in the '70's. They worked together with one voice and that basically is what the advocates for children have to do. They have to set priorities."

"To be effective, the advocates for youth and children have to be better coordinated and better focused."

"If there really were a well organized, competent group out there — child-care providers, or any child advocates — there would definitely be more money for day-care subsidies. As it is, you have low wages, less qualified day-care workers, high turnover, inadequate facilities and the overall environment for young children is much poorer than it should be—they are suffering greatly... Most legislators don't get the connection between these conditions and a lack of school readiness and there's nobody there who can hold their feet to the fire at election time asking, 'Why didn't you do this?'"

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Many leaders also commented that, considering the fiscal situation in their states and voter resistance to increasing taxes, the stated goals of child and family advocates they hear from are often unrealistic. Furthermore, they see this problem as being compounded by the advocates' resistance to compromise. State legislative leaders tend to see themselves as pragmatic dealmakers. In contrast, they frequently view the advocates as inflexible ideologues with too little understanding of the political process by which competing interests are accommodated.

"They have to realize you can't get everything, especially if it gets expensive, but by working together they're probably going to get most of what they want."

Leaders are not aware of grassroots or local constituencies for children. Interviews with the legislative leaders made clear that they do not draw great distinctions between the legislative process and the electoral process. In their view, the legislative and electoral processes are part of one continuous process. The issues legislators address during the legislative session and relationships formed with constituents, advocates and other groups often must lend themselves to supporting the re-election process.

"I'd try to establish some kind of grassroots network that I don't think really exists on children's issues. I've never had anyone come up to me and say 'Why don't you do more for the Parents for Teachers program? Or 'Why don't we do more to lower the social worker ratio?' 'Why don't you put more emphasis on training unwed mothers on how to be parents?"

"I could very easily drop my concern for kids and nobody would even notice."

Leaders lack timely, accurate and compelling information in a usable form. While it is true leaders seldom have or take the time to read research reports and other lengthy documents, when they do want information on a particular issue, they usually want it immediately and they want it to be accurate, understandable and compelling. Particularly in part-time legislatures where professional staffing is limited, legislative leaders indicate that solidly-researched information is helpful, especially if it is data that relates to individual legislative districts.

"Most people who call themselves 'advocates' provide a little information too late and then complain. That doesn't work."

Leaders perceive advocates to be partisan. The perception of nearly all the leaders interviewed is that most advocates are liberal Democrats.

To illustrate, several legislative leaders feel child and family advocates ignore conservative Democrats as potential allies simply because of their pro-life stance. In state after state, Republican leaders expressed similar views about the partisan nature of children's adocates:

"I wish more of the advocates would respect our philosophical differences. I read some of their newsletters and press releases and my viewpoint just gets bashed. I mean they are really criticizing [that] I'm not compassionate, and so on. When they

write that kind of stuff about me, well, they're not going to be too effective coming in to see me later. That's just human nature."

"There is a sense on the part of Republican legislators in both houses in my state that the overwhelming majority of these people [children's advocates] would rather have all Democrats to deal with. We [Republicans] get accused of being insensitive, of lacking compassion... I believe the advocates tend to deal with Democrat members more than they deal with Republican members. I think it is unfortunate. There are many members of our caucus who want to approach the resolution of a problem, but in a little different way. But it's not because they don't have shared concern about the broad theme of children. It's just not true. We're parents and grandparents. We have an involvement. We want to help..."

In sharp contrast to the leaders' perceptions, fully 65% of the child and family groups surveyed said they believe their organizations are perceived by legislative leaders to be totally nonpartisan. Only 29% indicated they believe legislative leaders thought their organizations were oriented toward Democrats.

Accountability is complex. Threats are unpopular with all public officials and engaging in acts of public recrimination against legislators who fail to support certain proposals can be risky. Leaders in both parties express resentment about "scorecards" kept by interest groups and other efforts that criticize voting records. They feel these ratings demonstrate a lack of understanding of legislative realities and build unnecessary barriers to future dialogue between advocates and legislators. As several leaders explained:

"Successful people in our business avoid permanent enemies."

"Don't attack the legislators. Come in and sit down and show the members the facts."

"Advocates just don't use common sense. How do they think I want to be treated? The contract lobbyists know."

And yet, it must be noted that leaders do respond to organized campaigns with political clout behind them.

"The seniors are very well organized. They meet regularly. They're well-financed. They have volunteer lobbyists with a great deal of experience. They come to your office knowing all the bill numbers, all the relevant committee assignments—they're extremely well-organized—and they're vicious in campaigns..."

The leaders report the lack of understanding of the political process by those who advocate for children and families is a major barrier to advancing child and family agendas. The unmistakable sentiment of legislative leaders is that these individuals and groups have little "feel" for the political process.

"So often 'advocates' for any issue have excellent people who have never done this [lobbying] before and the first thing they do is threaten you. Do not threaten me."

VII. HOW TO SUCCEED IN THE STATE CAPITOL (The Legislative Leaders' View)

recommendations for advancing legislative agendas for children and families

The interviews with the leaders revealed a core set of elements necessary to advance legislative agendas. Based on what the leaders reported and recommended, the following eight points form the basis of a blueprint for legislative success on behalf of children and families.

Establish consistent visibility and onging relationships with legislative leaders, legislators and legislative staff. In some state capitols, those who advocate for children and families are rarely seen or heard. Rather, they are unknown quantities who only seem to appear when "their" issue is being considered and all too often, they appear too late in the process to make a difference. As one leader recommended:

"Don't come at the last minute. Be involved all the time. Be friendly."

Build consensus around a realistic and manageable agenda that recognizes the role of compromise in the legislative process. Advocates for children and families must develop and promote legislative strategies that are adaptable to compromise while not sacrificing the essence of what they seek to achieve. Leaders often complain that those who advocate for children and families present an unrealistic, unworkable set of policy demands and then demonstrate little or no willingness or ability to compromise. Several leaders even stated that they feel advocates are intolerant of the legislative process, which by its very nature demands compromise and restraint. If leaders sense conflict or disagreement in the legislature over the priorities of those who advocate for children and families, they will shy away from commitment. This means that advocates should avoid presenting their issues as issues of conscience when compromise is not an option, because legislative leaders will seek to avoid "going on the record" on these difficult issues.

"It takes some political acumen to get political results. The people who are trying to change the system have to really do a good job of recognizing how much change the legislature can or will digest. If you are a purist and you, by God, have to have all the pie, and that's the only way it can be right for kids, it's going to take a lot longer than if you take a piece at a time."

Develop grassroots support for child and family issues on a district by district basis. Although presiding officers—senate presidents and house speakers—often must act as spokespersons for their party, speaking and taking stands on issues with statewide significance, each legislator, even the leader, is more likely to be responsive to lobbying by constituents from his/her own district than from people purporting to represent statewide organizations. Hearing directly from "the folks back home" clearly gets the attention of every legislative leader. But most leaders report they seldom hear from their constituents about child

and family issues:

"In terms of citizen involvement in my state in children's issues, there is some, but there is absolutely no comparison with the efforts of senior citizens or teachers groups."

Visible grassroots support is essential and legislators will respond to district voter support and participation on issues relating to children and families. Indeed, it will be primarily through grassroots efforts that legislators will be more fully informed about the actual status of children and families.

In addition to building grassroots support within legislative districts, it is essential that child and family groups broaden the base of their support at the local level to include leaders of the business and other professional communities. Several legislative leaders emphasized the importance of a grassroots organization:

"For your coalition, you need at a minimum an executive director, a lobbyist, and somebody to do grassroots work. If you can do that, you can get some changes."

Involve new voices and leaders from other sectors. Legislative leaders repeatedly speak of the importance of expanding the base of support for children and families by engaging representatives from other sectors in lobbying efforts. They feel that prominent civic, business, and religious leaders, as well as physicians, particularly pediatricians, would help draw the sustained attention to critical child and family issues:

To really see some change in my state, key business types will have to become committed. Local, respected corporate-type people [must] start saying, 'Hey, our economy is being drained by these problems involving kids. We've got to find solutions to these problems.'"

"It would take some new thrust, some group with political or financial clout, coming in to change things, to get the attention of the folks like the governor and the legislature. There's nothing like that now."

"For children's issues to become a real priority at the policy-making level, you need a voice out there that gets the attention of the policy-makers."

"Unless you can get a large number of individuals within a legislator's district arguing for children, you've got to get somebody with clout charging for children. When it's the people with the big bucks who become the voices for kids, it gets the attention of the policy-makers."

Employ bi-partisan strategies. The political landscape across America has changed dramatically since the elections in 1994. With a more conservative, Republican majority committed to family value issues and a limited role of government, advocates can address this new political environment by developing broad-based coalitions that cut across party lines and ideologies. It also means that advocates must seek out new allies and strive to build a vibrant grassroots organization.

Become active in the electoral campaign process. Those who care about children and families can dramatically strengthen their political clout by becoming more directly involved in political campaigns through voter registration drives and candidate forums. By becoming fully active in the electoral process, they can also bet-

ter inform legislators about the importance of child and families issues. Leaders need to hear from the voters who are their constituents.

"An agenda that involves children's issues is a surefire vote winner."

"Help in elections. If we believe in you, and you are in the political process, then we'll respond."

"It's not easy to raise money for a campaign when you're out there carrying the banner for kids, because nobody's paying much attention to that one."

Provide legislative leaders with factual and compelling information in a useable form. In this era of tax-cutting and cost-saving, public policy–makers feel tremendous pressure to justify every expenditure of the public's money before, during and, increasingly, after the expenditure is made. Even when hard data are not available, a persuasive case for funding and/or legislative support for programs for children and families can be made. Legislative leaders will respond to reasoned, thoughtful arguments, anecdotal evidence and a presentation of realistic expectations of what the proposed program or policy will achieve.

"What does make an impact with me is when they can show success, either here or in other states... We don't know what works or what doesn't work..."

"Persist with well-researched and accredited information and keep at it. Politics belongs to the persistent."

"I hope that ... state legislators truly focus on children and families. We are facing a huge national crisis if they don't."

"A good lobbyist never lies to you and is up front about biases."

"Don't be emotional, be practical. Use measurements for success that we can all understand. Don't lie. Give me the full picture."

Leaders acknowledge that child and family groups lack the financial resources necessary to ensure legislative effectiveness. Constantly the comparison was made between advocates and well financed lobbyists:

"Would it be helpful if there were an individual organization or a coalition of organizations interested in children that had funding and could hire professional lobbyists? Absolutely. The insurance industry has a minimum of ten lobbyists, each assigned to individual legislators...they have all kinds of information to shore up their position about why a legislator should vote a certain way. The child advocates have nothing like that... it's very minimal compared to some of the high-powered lobbyists in the state capitol... And it's not like the senior citizens or the teachers who are always in touch on issues they care about. There are individuals who care (about children and families), but it's not a big force for getting things done."

"I guess I'm real frustrated because in my opinion the child advocacy organization in my state should be out there beating the bushes to develop real advocacy for children and I don't see that happening. The person who heads the organization is a dear friend and real committed to children. I guess they can only do what they get funding to do. Their name is a misnomer if they can't lobby effectively for their agenda."

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"They need to have, if they can raise the money, somebody who has the lobby skills they need. And that's where you get into the problem because to get somebody with the skill level is a fair amount of money, or that person has got such a long list of clients that they can't give them the kind of service they need. They need lobby help, but to get the amount of help they need, they may have to go for, in baseball terms, the 35-home run hitter rather than the 50-home run hitter."

Become actively involved in the state budget process, get involved early, identify the key legislators and stay involved throughout the entire process. To improve their effectiveness in influencing the state budget, advocates must begin their work very early, even before the formal legislative session begins. Timing is essential to ensure that issues important to children and families are presented so that the legislative agenda can reflect these concerns. Generally, the budget originates in the executive branch. In most instances, any proposal requiring funding will have far greater odds of success if funding is in place at the starting point of the budget process.

"Children's advocates have to understand the budget-making process to be effective. Timing is critical—when to approach people in cabinet–level state agencies as they prepare their budget recommendations; when to be in touch with the state budget director's office; when to make their case to the committees considering their legislation. And ultimately, it comes down to the final negotiation between three people: the speaker, the senate president, and the state budget director — or the governor himself. It's a year–round process and to be effective, advocates need to be involved all along the way."

As one state legislative leader observed:

"We have an organizational session in December, and if we have a majority, we begin to deal with the budget and the agenda that flows from the budget then and there. We don't wait until we convene."

The actual budget process differs from state to state, and the handling of the process by the leadership differs as well. In some states the budget is the primary responsibility of the presiding officers, while in other legislatures responsibility for managing the budget process rests with the majority leader, the budget committee chair, (or ways and means, revenue, appropriations committee), or by a house and senate conference committee.

Often,there are no clear paths to who wields the true power in many state legislatures. Accordingly, the legislator(s) who hold the most influential position in the budget process are sometimes ignored by those who seek to influence the process. One leader expressing his frustration commented:

"Children's lobbyists must think I'm stupid. I'm on the Joint Fiscal Committee, but in six years as a leader, they've never come."

The leaders explain there are few changes in the budget once agreement is reached among the major legislative and executive branch players in the budget debate:

"Last on [the budget] is first off. They'll get bumped [if children's advocates arrive late to the budget process]."

CONCLUSION

Our findings make it clear that state legislative leaders are neither fully versed about the extent of the crisis affecting children and families in America nor adequately informed about successful child and family policies and programs. Although the role is changing, a legislative leader's principal job remains focused on managing the day-to-day affairs of the state legislature and insuring passage of the state budget. This translates into dealing with constituents' and members' issues, resolving disputes and forging alliances, and generally moving the process along as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Above all else, it must be remembered that state legislative leaders are consummate people-oriented people. The task of identifying critical public policy issues and developing ideas and solutions for resolving these issues rests mainly with the people the leader turns to for information and counsel—his/her colleagues in the legislature, family, friends, lobbyists, staff, business, civic, religious leaders, ordinary citizens. Although leaders acknowledge and often seek out different opinions and contrary ideas, they feel most comfortable dealing with people with whom they share some common experience or background.

We have made the argument that if leaders are to become more engaged with child and family issues, those who advocate for children and families will have to change their tactics. There is no escaping the fact that the leaders we interviewed—and although there has been an election since the interviews were conducted, the perceptions and attitudes of the new leaders are not at all likely to be much different from their predecessors—have a broadly unfavorable perception of the advocacy community. Part of this perception derives from lack of understanding of what advocates do, part from a perception that the advocates do not understand or care about the political process, part from the fact that so many things occupy the leaders' time that they simply do not place child and family issues very high on their priority list.

Whatever the reasons, getting leaders to become more pro-active will require a fundamental rethinking of strategy. The challenge for those who advocate for children and families and who see legislative support as important is to figure out how best to connect with these leaders. As a member of our steering committee recommended:

"I would like to see the entire field of child advocates challenged and supported in their thoughtful re-examination of what works and why and how to work together towards effective advocacy for children."

But we also recognize that the need to promote greater cooperation and communication with legislative leaders does not solely rest with child and family advocates, philanthropic foundations, or for that matter, with parents and children. Though we believe these groups and individuals must continually strive to strengthen and expand their participation in the political process, a significant measure of responsibility for action rests squarely on state legislative leaders themselves.

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This report, therefore, is more than a call to child and family advocates and philanthropic foundations to become bolder in their efforts to help children and families. This report is also a summons to state legislative leaders to assume a new mantle of responsibility that goes well beyond their current preoccupations with managing the legislative process, passing the budget, speaking for their party, forging compromise, raising money, and the entire panoply of other tasks that fall on today's state legislative leader.

We call for state legislative leaders to seize the initiative and make the caring and nurturing of our children and families a central legislative priority. State legislative leaders can do this better than perhaps any other political constituency. They can help bring the tremendous human resources of their respective states fully to bear on the issues that define children and families. By the stature of their office, the power they wield to shape the debate and their innate and–astonishingly–largely untapped skills as consummate coalition-builders and problem-solvers, they have the ability to get it done.

We challenge them to rediscover an old aspect of public service-public stewardship. Children can't vote, can't approach leaders — so they must view their devotion to the broader public good as incorporating the perspectives of these future citizens. This means that state legislative leaders must take a pro-active stance vis a vis children, using every opportunity to ask constituents and lobbyists — for any cause or bill — how children and families are faring in their district, how children and families would benefit or suffer from their recommendations.

We call for leaders to raise the stakes, through their own prioritization of children and families as a key constituency. We seek — and our country needs — a new style of leadership — a leadership that steps forward and challenges Americans to put aside their individual wants and concerns for the greater good of our country.

Our job also does not end with this report. The next step for the State Legislative Leaders Foundation is to bring state legislative leaders from across the country together around the subject of children and families. Our goal is to establish a national educational forum for legislative leaders that focuses on the true breadth and scope of the problems confronting children and families, how these problems relate to virtually every aspect of our society's well-being, and what state political leaders can do to address the needs of today's children and families as well as those of future generations.

We will also work with those who advocate on behalf of children and families. We will share with them what we know about legislatures and leadership and how we believe they can improve their impact on and access to the state legislative process. We will meet with these constituencies in national, regional and state-based programs and workshops.

Advocates for children and families and state legislative leaders face an immense job. The former need to improve their ability to influence the latter; the latter need to see child and family issues as too important to leave to the vagaries of the prevailing political winds.

Both can be achieved. Both must, if we hope to save our children and ourselves.

Our goal is to establish a national educational forum for legislative leaders that focuses on the true breadth and scope of the problems confronting children and families...

ENDNOTES

1. We define state legislative leaders to include all house speakers, senate presidents, majority leaders, minority leaders, pro tempores and selected appropriations/budget committee chairs—in total, fewer than 450 of the more than 7,000 state legislators in the United States.

2. Ronald A Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 26.

3. See Appendix A for a complete listing of Steering and Policy Committee members.

4. See Appendices B through D. For more information concerning the methodology and survey instruments used to gather data for this project, contact the State Legislative Leaders Foundation.

5. Handbook of State Legislative Leaders, The State Legislative Leaders Foundation, Centerville, MA, 1995 ed.

6. Thomas H. Little, "Understanding Legislative Leadership Beyond the Chamber: The Members' Perspective" Prepared for Submission to The Legislative Studies Quarterly, Revision: May 22, 1994, p. 4.

7. Ibid., p.1.

8. From a lecture delivered by Professor James Clawson at the 1995 State Legislative Leaders Foundation, Leaders Advanced Management Program, "Maximizing Your Personal Leadership Skills," (Charlottesville: Darden Graduate School of Business), April 29, 1995.

Members of the Steering Committee

Jean Adnopoz, Coordinator of Community Child Development Program - Yale University Child Study Center

Susan Bales - Director of Children's Programs, Benton Foundation

Senator Ben Brown - Chair, Business & Labor Committee, Oklahoma

Charles Bruner - Executive Director, Child and Family Policy Center

Representative Jane Campbell - House Majority Whip, Ohio

Larry L. Campbell - President, Victory Group, Inc. and former Speaker of the House, Oregon

Representative Lois DeBerry - House Speaker Pro Tempore, Tennessee

Margaret Dunkle, Senior Associate - Institute for Educational Leadership

Cynthia Farrar, Special Assistant to the Secretary - Yale University

Kathleen Feely - Associate Director, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Frank Furstenberg, Zellerbach Family Professor of Sociology - University of Pennsylvania

Regis Groff - Director, Youth Offenders System, Colorado Department of Corrections

Bill Harris, Treasurer - KidsPac

Lucy Hudson, Senior Associate - Center for the Study of Social Policy

Judy Meredith, President - Meredith and Associates

Janice Molnar - Deputy Director, The Ford Foundation

Representative Bill Purcell - House Majority Leader, Tennnessee

Representative Raymond G. Sanchez - Speaker of the House, New Mexico

Representative Georganna Sinkfield - Chair, Children & Youth Committee, Georgia

Linda Tarr-Whelan, Chief Executive Officer - Center for Policy Alternatives

Judy Weitz - Consultant

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Stephen G. Lakis - President

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Dick Bennett - Bennett/Deardourff Opinion Research, New Hampshire

John Deardourff - Bennett/Deardourff Opinion Research, Virginia

Paul Maslin - Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates, California

Methodology for State Legislative Leader Interviews

Personal interviews with 177 state legislative leaders in all 50 states were conducted by the principals of the two polling firms from mid-March through December, 1994. The major goal of the interviews was twofold: to gain a detailed understanding of the perceptions of state legislative leaders regarding issues facing children and families and an understanding of how state legislative leaders and the state legislative process address these issues.

A formal, structured, nondisguised questionnaire was developed for this project. This instrument was used primarily as a guide to insure that all important and relevant topics were covered at some point during the interviews. The personal interviews were, in fact, "depth" interviews designed to give the state legislative leaders a free hand in providing information regarding the legislative process and its impact on children and families. The pollsters elected to use depth, loosely structured interviews for a number of reasons:

- *state legislative leaders are "experts" who are more at ease engaging in conversation than in responding to the rigidity of more formal, structured interviews*

- *experts tend to phrase responses as part of a story, and questionnaires requiring rigid responses tend to suppress the storytelling aspects of an interview thereby limiting the value of the responses*

- *it was important not to restrict the legislative leaders to the questionnaire if they believed that they could provide insights beyond the specific questions in the questionnaire*

- *the time that the legislative leaders were able to spend on the interviews varied from 30 minutes to over three hours and, while most interviews took approximately one hour to complete, it was important to have a flexible structure that permitted the legislative leaders to provide as much information as possible within the time they had available*

- *the range of meaningful responses varied significantly from leader to leader and from state to state*

- *the interviews were designed to uncover new ideas that could directly improve the lives of children and families and too much structure in interviews among experts could limit the range of new ideas that might develop during the course of the interviews.*

Selecting the proper method of sampling was also important in this project. A random sample of top legislative leaders in each state would not guarantee that the final sample would adequately represent top leaders (i.e., Senate Presidents, Speakers of the House, and Majority and Minority Leaders) and/or other leaders directly involved in dealing with child and family issues on a day-to-day basis during a legislative session. Therefore, "judgment sampling" was used to insure that the final sample adequately represented all relevant segments of state legislative leaders. These included the top leadership positions - Senate President, Speaker, Majority Leader and Minority Leader - and those leaders directly involved with public policy issues concerning children and families. Deliberate sample choices were made based first on the knowledge and sound judgment of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, and second based on the

knowledge and sound judgment of top legislative leaders as they were interviewed.

The SLLF provided access to the presiding officers and majority and minority leaders in each state with initial contacts made by mail and by telephone. When these key state legislative leaders were interviewed by the pollsters, they were asked to recommend and suggest other leaders in their respective states who were directly involved with legislation concerning children and families.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations ranging from statehouses to business offices to legislators' district offices. The pollsters conducting the interviews also travelled to the homes of legislative leaders, to their churches and even held one interview in a taxicab! A significant number of interviews were also conducted at conventions and seminars sponsored by the State Legislative Leaders Foundation and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The process of scheduling the interviews was extraordinarily difficult. Some leaders refused to be interviewed, offering reasons ranging from lack of time to concerns about their familiarity with the subject, to preoccupation with elections.

Others repeatedly canceled their appointments, requiring the pollster/s to make multiple visits to their states. In all, the pollsters conducted 151 interviews face-to-face and 26 by telephone.

All state legislative leaders interviewed were guaranteed anonymity and most of the interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Quotes from the leaders that are contained in this report are unattributed to comply with the guarantee made to the leaders.

Because of the careful nature used to select respondents for this survey, the sample provides a proper mix of not only top state legislative leaders but also a relevant mix of key legislative committee chairs directly involved with child and family issues. The sample, therefore, is minimally equal to a probability sample because it represents most relevant segments of state legislative leadership as they relate to issues concerning children and families.

Limitations. While the completed interviews for this project represent a majority of the top state legislative leaders in the United States, the results cannot be projected to the remaining state legislative leaders who were not interviewed. However, the common patterns of response concerning the state legislative process and issues facing children and families found throughout all of the interviews strongly suggest that the results from these interviews would be reliable across all state legislative leaders had all leaders been interviewed.

Because the interviews were granted based on the condition of anonymity, this report does not provide a state-by-state analysis or summary of the relationship between the legislative leaders and the issues of children and families. What the report does offer is an analysis and summary which should be helpful in forming legislative strategies in any and all 50 states.

APPENDIX C

Sample Letter to Legislative Leaders

May 25, 1994

Legislative Leader
State Capitol
Somewhere, USA

Dear Legislative Leader:

Usually a letter from me means an invitation to attend one of our conferences. This time, however, I am writing to ask for a special favor. I need an hour of your precious time and you won't have to leave the comfort of your office.

The State Legislative Leaders Foundation, with grants from the Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations, is embarking on a unique initiative called, "State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children." Increasingly, the issues of children are gaining the attention of the media, the electorate, academia, policy-makers and elected officials. We find legislative leaders across the country seeking solutions to the pressing public policy concerns of the 90's - from public safety to job creation to improving our public educational system - all issues which relate directly to children.

Our project is, in essence, a study of what you and your colleagues across the country think about the issues of children and families. What is especially significant about this initiative is the fact that two of the country's largest private foundations have recognized that in order to help children and families, it is imperative that individuals and groups concerned about these issues work with the legislative branch of government. To do so effectively requires an understanding of how to work with our nation's legislative leaders.

As a part of our project, we would like to arrange for you to be interviewed for an hour by one of the country's leading political polling and survey research firms. Our purpose is to learn, in a face to face interview, what you feel can and should be done to help children and families. Specifically we hope that you will share with the pollsters your candid views and insights regarding the legislative process, those issues which affect children and families and the relationship between the process and subsequently how policies are developed that affect children and families.

To assist us with this bi-partisan Project, we have engaged the expert assistance of two of the most experienced and highly regarded political polling and survey Legislative Leader research firms in the country: Bennett/Deardourff Opinion Research and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates. Only the principals from these firms will be conducting the interviews for our Project. The information provided by you and your colleagues in the interviews will be gathered confidentially and will form the basis of a report to be published next fall. Please be assured that this information will be kept completely confidential.

I do hope that you will find time to share your insights with us for this important project. You will be making a significant contribution toward helping us understand how best to meet the needs of America's children. I will be in touch with you shortly to ascertain your availability and to schedule an interview with you. In the meantime, please feel free to call me or Project Director Margaret Blood at 508-771-3821 or 800-532-3375.

Thank you for your support and cooperation. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Yours very truly,

Stephen G. Lakis

Stephen G. Lakis

President

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APPENDIX D

Methodology for Advocate Survey

In an effort to develop a more complete understanding of how state legislative leaders understand child and family policy issues in their states, this project sought the input of a broad cross-section of child and family advocates and advocacy groups. In order to acquire this input, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation developed a list of 434 state-based child and family advocacy organizations. This comprehensive list was compiled with the assistance of the Children's Defense Fund, the National Association of Child Advocates and the Coalition for America's Children (through the auspices of the Benton Foundation).

While the goal was to develop as inclusive a list as possible, it may not in fact have been all inclusive. It is believed that it does fairly represent a cross-section of the child and family advocacy community, including those organizations which are devoted solely to advocacy activities as well as those that also provide a range of services to children and families. The latter includes organizations that provide child care, child welfare, health care and education, among other services.

Specified contacts within each organization were mailed a survey package consisting of:

(1) an introductory letter

(2) the questionnaire

(3) a postage-paid return envelope

(4) a "Children First" pen as an incentive

Survey packages were mailed the third week of October, 1994. The questionnaire had a return date of November 4, 1994, although returns were accepted through the end of December, 1994.

Follow-up telephone calls were made to each of the 434 contacts to ask that the survey be completed and returned. Based upon responses from the telephone contacts and mail returns, it was determined that 150 of the original 434 organizations were not engaged in any state-based legislative activities on behalf of children or families. This left a pool of 284 state-based groups performing legislative activities. A total of 167 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 59% for the pool of advocacy groups determined to be performing state-based legislative activities.

Limitations - The theoretical margin of error for any survey is the difference of what is generated through a sample and the true population value if a census were taken. The theoretical margin of error, however, does not take into consideration the practical difficulties of conducting a survey. The most noticeable practical difficulties range from the impact of non-response to question wording. Are those not responding to the survey the same as those who do respond? Do the questions really measure what they are supposed to measure? While a great effort was made to reduce the many types of error not covered by the theoretical margin of error, there is absolutely no way to tell if the results are affected by some factor, or factors, not covered by the theoretical margin of error.

"The great events of this world are not battles and elections and earthquakes and thunderbolts. The great events are babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity, but is still expecting good will to become incarnate in each human life."

—Anonymous

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